

Application No.: 10/812,411



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Docket No.: 543822004700

AMENDMENTS TO THE DRAWINGS

The attached sheet(s) of drawings includes changes to designate Figure 1 by legend as
Prior Art.

Attachment: Replacement sheet

REMARKS

The specification has been objected to since the abstract is too long, and the drawings have been objected to as failing to designate Figure 1 as Prior Art. The abstract and drawings (Figure 1) have been amended. No new matter has been added.

Claim 4 has been objected to due to informalities. Claim 4 has been amended accordingly.

Claims 1-4 have been rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as unpatentable over Miyaji. The rejection is respectfully traversed.

As indicated by the Examiner, Miyaji fails to explicitly disclose one or more vacuum valves for isolating a mask chamber from the rest of the lithography system (see, paragraph 10, on page 4 of the Office Action). However, the Examiner notes that “elsewhere in...Miyaji...vacuum valves [are used] for the purpose of maintaining isolation between separate vacuum environments...” and that it would have been obvious to the skilled artisan “to have provided vacuum valves in Miyaji [sic] et al. in order to maintain isolation between adjacent independently evacuable regions as taught by Miyaji [sic] et al.”

As an initial matter, the Examiner fails to provide a reference in support of reasons to modify the applied reference. The Examiner may not make conclusory statements of obviousness without evidentiary support on the record. Applicant respectfully requests that the Examiner cite a reference in support of his/her reasons for modifying the reference, or withdraw the rejection.

In any event, Miyaji fails to disclose a gas supply line adapted to provide an inert gas to a mask chamber for dechucking a mask in the vacuum mask chamber. Rather, Miyaji teaches filling a first chamber 1 with nitrogen gas to establish a desired inert gas atmosphere for projection exposure (Fig. 5 and col. 8, lns. 54-60). Additionally, in Miyaji, the reticle/mask is dechucked in a separate chamber (“reticle cassette storage means (reticle library) RC” and not in the first chamber 1 (see, col. 8, lns. 22/23 and Fig. 5), and Miyaji teaches away from using an electrostatic chuck since

it suggests using nitrogen to "remove the static electricity appearing on the reticle R1" (col. 6, lns. 59-62).

Since the recited structure has not been disclosed by the applied prior art, claims 1-4 are patentable.

Claims 4-7 have been rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as unpatentable over Miyaji in view of Klebanoff, further in view of Yoshida. The rejection is respectfully traversed for the same reasons presented in the arguments above, and for the following reasons. The Examiner simply states that it would have been advantageous to combine the references, without stating why it would have been obvious to do so. The Examiner must provide support on the record indicating why it would have been obvious to the skilled artisan at the time of the invention to combine the references. Simply stating that a reference discloses a specific feature is not enough to provide motivation to combine.

In view of the above, each of the presently pending claims in this application is believed to be in immediate condition for allowance. Accordingly, the Examiner is respectfully requested to withdraw the outstanding rejection of the claims and to pass this application to issue. If it is determined that a telephone conference would expedite the prosecution of this application, the Examiner is invited to telephone the undersigned at the number given below.

In the event the U.S. Patent and Trademark office determines that an extension and/or other relief is required, applicant petitions for any required relief including extensions of time and authorizes the Commissioner to charge the cost of such petitions and/or other fees due in connection with the filing of this document to Deposit Account No. 03-1952 referencing docket no. 543822004700.

However, the Commissioner is not authorized to charge the cost of the issue fee to the Deposit Account.

Dated: September 12, 2006

Respectfully submitted,

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Attachments